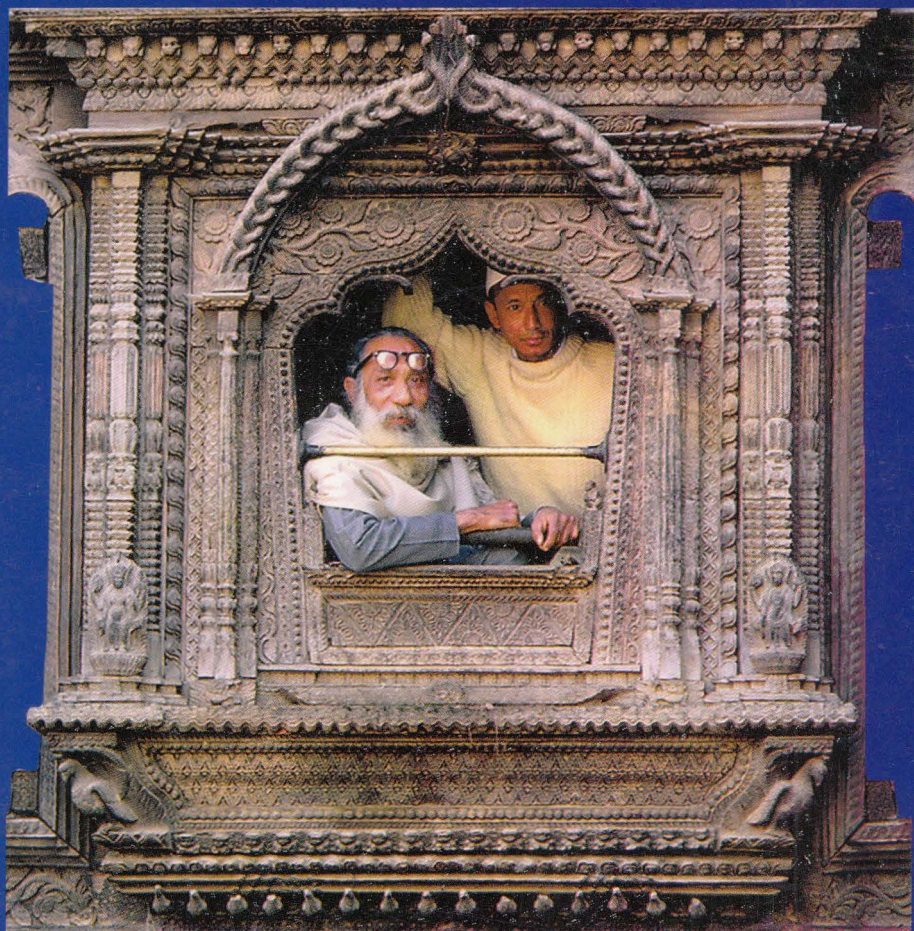


THE LIFE AND TIMES

of

**Kavi Keshari
Chittadhar 'Hridaya'**



Translated from Nepal Bhasha
by
Kesar Lall

रवि शाक्य, इखाछें, यल

Excerpts from JIGU JATAH

THE LIFE AND TIMES
of
Kavi Keshari
CHITTADHAR "HRIDAYA"
(1906 - 1982)

Translated from Nepal Bhasha
By
Kesar Lall

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Translator's Note

The *jatah* (horoscope) of Kavi Keshari Chittadhar "Hridaya" prepared by an astrologer was burnt according to custom with his mortal remains in 1982.

An account of the poet's life and times with the title **Jigu Jatah** (My Horoscope) was found among his unpublished works. He began writing it in 1936 and covered the first 53 years in a lifespan of 74 years. The 277–page long "horoscope" began with his date of birth in 1906 and ended in 1959. It was subsequently published serially in 35 installments in the bi-monthly **Nepal Ritupau** over a period of nine years from 1987 to 1996.

In 1956, King Mahendra conferred on Chittadhar the title of "Kavi Keshari" (Lion among Poets). He had begun to use the pseudonym "Hridaya" since 1933 when he got his first book of poems, **Padma Nikunja** (Lotus Garden) printed in Calcutta only to be seized by the government in Nepal. His first poem had appeared in 1926 in a bi-monthly **Buddhadharma**, brought out from Calcutta by the Buddhist scholar Dharmaditya Dharmacharya. There are to his credit 33 books and more than 100 poems, essays and stories. Seven books and more than 100 poems, essays and stories remain unpublished.

Two of his most prized publications are **Sugata Saurabha**, an epic about the Life and Teachings of the Buddha (1949) and a novel, **Mimmanahpau**. (1968). The title meant "a letter that didn't burn." It was a letter from a Newar merchant in Lhasa to his wife in Kathmandu that she had treasured during her lifetime and didn't burn in the flames that consumed her remains. These two books, he proudly called, were his progeny. The epic was the "son" and the novel a "daughter." He was a versatile writer in different genres of literature and his output was great.

While the published works reveal in a large measure the man that he was, it is **Jigu Jatah** published posthumously that gives a true picture of Kavi Keshari Chittadhar "Hridaya." The narrative is yet to be published in book form.

Chittadhar's life prior to the revolution of 1950-51 was one of slow growth to adolescence, dominated with the desire, thanks to his guru Yogavir Simha, to bring some change in the milieu of the mercantile Tuladhar-Kansakar-Tamrakar community with their many religious and social duties and customs. He was also eager to reform Buddhist practices to the displeasure of the priests. Sometimes he was found deferring the status quo. Much to the despair of his mother, Chittadhar spent year after year in the pursuit of a dream of social reform. To his own disappointment, he could not claim much success. Finally, he was drawn to literature in Nepal Bhasha, his mother tongue, to give vent to his feelings and frustrations. While his social and religious ideas earned him the wrath of certain segments of the society, his literary efforts offended the authorities and landed him in jail. But he was a man of his word, and he wisely decided to fight it out with words – poems, essays and short stories. Thanks to his lifelong dedication, he succeeded not only in being recognized as the foremost writer in Nepal Bhasha but also a source of inspiration to scores of young writers.

In the domestic front, Chittadhar was most fortunate to have a very intelligent mother, who held the family together during a decade of her husband's absence from home and gently guided her son to a respectable niche in a large kinship group of traders and old housewives.

Chittadhar didn't like his wife, Gyan Prabha, from the outset. For a dozen years he treated her with great indifference. In the end, however, the gentle woman won the day with her great love and infinite patience. The mother finally had the satisfaction of seeing her wayward son fall in love with his wife. In the years that followed Chittadhar adored his wife with a vengeance. Gyan Prabha

inspired him to write **Mimmanahpau**, credit for which he also attributed candidly to Stefan Zweig's novella in German, **Brief einer Unbekannten** (1922) that he had, with Tirtha Raj Tuladhar, translated into Nepal Bhasha from the English version, **Letter From An Unknown Woman** in 1966.

Many of Chittadhar's poems were inspired by his mother, wife and sister Moti Laxmi. Chittadhar's literary, social and religious activities were doubtless facilitated by the comparative affluence of the family with a long history of trading in Lhasa. For only a decade was he ever engaged in gainful employment as a partner in a business.

After the watershed year of 1951, **Jigu Jatah** became a chronicle of fast-paced events. In the same year, he founded **Nepal Ritupau** and in 1955 the Nepal Bhasha Parishad was formed, his two most important and enduring legacy to future writers. He was also involved in the development of textbooks in Nepal Bhasha and in teaching in schools. He took part in conferences and seminars in the country and went abroad as a delegate from Nepal. In **Jigu Jatah** Chittadhar had left for posterity a record of the events during the first decade of democratic innovations in Nepal as well as an honest, candid and humble account of his personal life.

In recognition of his contribution as a poet, he was honored by the government by bringing out a postage stamp posthumously. It would be worth the while and efforts to bring out **Jigu Jatah** in book form. Further, an English version would be of much interest to our friends abroad who appreciate our literary and cultural heritage.

When Mr. Phanindra Ratna Vajracharya, the current Chairman of Nepal Bhasha Parishad, conceived of a booklet in English for the poet's 100th birthday celebrations this year, I readily agreed to translate selected portions of **Jigu Jatah**. However, I had to be very selective and take editorial liberty to make the narrative coherent and orderly. I would like to thank Prof. Tej Ratna Kansakar for his help in this task. I would also like to acknowledge

that I have borrowed some extracts of poems from the translation of **Sugata Saurabha** by Tirtha Raj Tuladhar.

I would like to dedicate this translation as a humble tribute to Kavi Keshari Chittadhar "Hridaya."

K.L.

April 28, 2006.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF CHITTADHAR "HRIDAYA"

Early Years

I was born in 1906 according to the Gregorian reckoning. It was on a Friday, the 11th day of the dark fortnight of Bachala, the seventh month, in the year 1026 of our Nepal era. By the solar calendar of the official Vikram era, it was the 5th day of the second month, Jestha, in 1963.

The founder of our family was none other than the legendary *Sahu* (merchant) Keshachandra Mallapati. My father's name was Drabyadhar Tuladhar and my mother's Gyan Laxmi. We lived at Tunchen off Nyeta (Naradevi) in Kathmandu. An elder brother didn't survive more than one year. That made me the only son in the family, consisting of my grandmother, Mani Thakun, my parents and sisters. There were altogether four girls, younger than I. The earliest recollection I have of my parents was of their cuddling me. I was so happy in their lap! They gave me all their attention. They loved me so much.

Soon after my 5th birthday in 1912 A.D., from the auspicious day of Sri Panchami, I was taught to read and write the Nagari alphabets.

By the next Sri Panchami, I was reading **Canaka**, the first book of ancient wisdom. The foundation of my education was laid during those two years. I was able to read stories and recite a few Sanskrit hymns. In an illiterate community, I, a six-year old boy, was called "educated." I was proud of my achievement and went about with a "big nose."

People normally did not get vaccinated against smallpox in those days. When I got the infection, it was so severe I lay senseless for a couple of days. It left scars on my face forever.

At the age of seven, I had my *busakha*, the first haircut, as well as *kayatapuja* and wore a loincloth for the first time. Thereafter, I was taken to our *agam*, the secret family shrine, and initiated into a religious duty called *nhikan*. I was warned not to divulge the secrets of the *agam* to anyone. For the next 17 years, the sacred words of the secret mantra became a part of my daily morning ritual.

After my 8th birthday, I was given a copy of **Amarkosh**, the standard Sanskrit lexicon, and the priest who came to our house every morning to recite religious texts was asked to teach me the Sanskrit language. I liked to learn well enough but on some days I kept myself hidden in a room until the priest left. So my mother said to her brother, Mandas, who was learning Sanskrit with a Brahmin pundit in the neighbourhood, "Your nephew is playing truant. Take him along with you and make him go through **Amarkosh**."

My mother was illiterate but she was very intelligent. She helped me with my lessons. She made me read the book and detected my mistakes. But the teacher left the neighbourhood and my education did not make much progress.

In my 9th year I was no longer an innocent boy. I was full of mischief. I spent much of my time away from home. My mother's father, Ratna Das Tuladhar, was a merchant and lived at Asan. Being the only grandson from his oldest daughter he pampered me. And so I was mostly at Asan playing with the boys of my age. Sometimes we wandered along the riverbanks far from home. From a little scholar I became a bad boy in no time. Once I was confined to a room for many days and made to recite the name of Manjusri, the Buddhist god of wisdom.

My mother had a very persuasive tongue. What my grandmother and father failed to make me do in their high-handed manner, a few words from my mother made me an obedient child. When I was 10 years old, my mother insisted that her boy should have a proper education. She made my father enroll me in a school

where Sanskrit was taught to Brahmin boys. Within six months, I overtook the other pupils in the class. Despite the fact that I spent much of my time playing, I stood second in the examination. However, my mother got wind of my waywardness and she did not send me back to the school after the winter vacation.

My father used to draw sketches of the gods on the wall in the house. I made some sketches too. I could have become an artist if I have had some training. I loved painting.

My grandmother died in the winter of 1918, and I cried for a long time. She had been a great support to me. But that didn't prevent me from taking out small amounts of money that my father had kept for the memorial services.

There was much to do in the house. One sister, already married, had returned to her husband's house. My mother suffered much from pain in her legs and there was no one else to help her. So, soon after my 14th birthday, my parents decided that it was time for me to get married. They thought that the wedding should coincide with the annual memorial service for grandmother to which all our relatives had to be invited. The purpose was to save expenses by organizing one feast for two events.

A search was soon afoot to find a wife for me. But who would give their daughter to a good-for-nothing like me? However, some believed that my family background was excellent and about a dozen horoscopes were received from different houses. None of them matched with mine. Finally, the horoscope of Gyan Prabha, daughter of Sahu Bhaju Ratna Kansakar of Takhachem in Kel Tole was found good enough and the parents on both sides agreed to the marriage. My bride-to-be was two years younger than me.

My father then sold some plots of our ancestral land for the wherewithal for the coming events. Soon after the memorial service, the wedding took place in the spring of 1919.

Father leaves for Lhasa

My grandfather, Tejdhara, had died in Lhasa and an uncle, Mahadhar, never returned home. Having lived almost idly for nearly half a century, my father now thought of replenishing our fortune by a business trip to Lhasa, where our ancestors had made themselves well known since long. He mortgaged more plots of land and invested the amount in goods. He also bought broad cloth and corals on credit. Thus, taking with him about Rs. 20,000/- worth of merchandise, father left for Lhasa in the summer of 1920. For several weeks after his departure I went to the temples in the evening to offer lights to the gods for his safe journey to Lhasa.

We were much relieved when news came of my father's arrival in Lhasa. I wrote a letter in reply as dictated by my mother and got somebody to write the address on the envelope. Later, I managed to do it myself, and it rekindled in me some interest in learning.

Unlike my father, mother was very careful with her money. Once I filched five rupees and she found about it right away. However, I had to have small amounts of money for many little things as I had no employment of any sort and I spent the days wandering around, riding on a bicycle or playing with the boys in the streets. But I soon found a way to solve my problem. My father often sent home Tibetan money in little parcels. I received the money from the customs office and gave one bag less to my mother. Later, I got the Tibetan coins exchanged for Nepalese money. As she could not read father's letter herself, mother did not know the number of bags actually sent by father.

Years later, my father having been away from home for almost a decade, I was prepared to go to Lhasa and replace him at the shop. However, my mother's health had not improved all those years and I was not quite well either. So, she was not willing to let me undertake the arduous journey to Lhasa. Eventually, during the winter of 1928, we sent someone else to help father. Four years

later, in the summer of 1932, father wound up the business and came back. I went to meet him at Kalimpong. My father and uncle Mahadhar, who lived in Calcutta, had not seen each other for more than three decades. They had a most joyous union. Then father and I made our way back home.

All these many years I had done no work. Once, I met Bhadant Ananda Kausalyayana, the well-known Buddhist monk from India, at Dhaman Sahu's place in Kathmandu. He asked what I did for a living. I had told him nonchalantly, "Business." To my embarrassment, he repeated, "What kind of business?" I replied reluctantly, "My father is in Lhasa. He sends home different kinds of things and I sell these. Then I send him the merchandise he needs there." My indifference seemed to have annoyed him and he said, "Even birds find their own food. And you are living on your father's earning!" I remembered these words for a long time.

Soon after his return, father said to me, "We no longer have the business in Lhasa. You cannot carry it alone either. You must find something else to do."

In Business - "Mandas & Chittadhar"

My uncle Mandas who was also unemployed at that time was thinking of launching a small business on his own. I had brought from Calcutta a dozen bicycles for him the previous year but he had not opened his shop yet. I entered into partnership and "Mandas & Chittadhar" went into business with a shop at Kamalachi, Ason in the fall of 1932. Each of us invested Rs. 394/39 but the few bicycles, as our trading stock was quite inadequate. Subsequently I sold my wife's ornaments and gifts given her at the wedding. I went to Calcutta with about Rs.500/- and bought sundry goods for our shop.

During my stay in Calcutta, I also got my first two slim volumes of poems entitled "**Padma-Nikunja**" (Lotus Garden) and "**Hridaya-Kusum**" (Heart Blossoms) printed under the pseudonym

"Hridaya." My uncle's interest in books soon gave us the idea of including school-books and Buddhist publications for sale in our shop.

Later, mainly because of my writing in Nepal Bhasha, I was implicated in the political imbroglio that was going on for some time, and in the winter of 1940 I was jailed along with a number of other people. During my incarceration, my uncle kept the business going but after my release, he felt somewhat apprehensive about continuing the partnership. After 15 years, I gave up the bicycle and book business for good.

Scholarly Pursuits

In the summer of 1926 I had tried to learn Sanskrit again. Five times before I had failed for various reasons. I began it at home with a Buddhist priest when I was eight years old. Then I was packed off to a Brahmin's place. After that I found myself among a bunch of Brahmin boys in a school. Then I went to two Buddhist priests in succession. For the sixth time, a Brahmin pundit came to our house to teach. My sister, Moti Laxmi, also took lessons. However, within a year, blood in my sputum frightened us all out of our wits. That brought my Sanskrit to an abrupt end. Three years later, in 1929, we got another pundit to come to teach. But only my sister sat for lessons. I was still scared to pursue my scholarly interest. The symptoms of tuberculosis had to be taken very seriously in those days.

As my uncle Mandas was an avid reader he had a good collection of religious and philosophical works in Hindi. I did not understand Hindi in the beginning, but I learned a great deal in course of time from my uncle's books.

My little knowledge of Sanskrit was, however, enough to make me proud of my learning. I had learnt many words by heart and not only used as many of these as I could but also urged my friends to follow my example. "Even if there is no Sanskrit word in

your work," my friends said to me, "your language reads like Sanskrit." But, later, fed up with the vanity of those who proclaimed themselves the sole heir to Sanskrit, I looked for words of our own language and I found aplenty of them. Thereafter, I minimized the use of Sanskrit words as much as I could.

The Plea for a Library

Maharaja Chandra Shumshere died in December 1929 and he was succeeded by his brother Bhim Shumshere. The new Maharaja made a public announcement: "I shall always be attentive to such tasks that would contribute to a better government, bring prosperity to the country and promote happiness and peace among the people. I hope that all of you would devote single-mindedly to such tasks for the sake of the king and subjects. I shall depend on your support in such tasks."

Believing that they were also duty-bound to do something, in early 1930 a dozen men first met at Yogavir Simha's house and on the next day, about 50 men gathered at Kasa Kothi in Takhachem. The assembly concluded that education was most important and therefore, there should be schools first and a public library was also needed for those who were past the school-going age. A petition to the Maharaja for permission to open a public library was drawn then and there.

Two days later, I was told that the petition was not properly worded and presented with another for my signature. Altogether 45 men had signed the petition. However, before its submission someone reported to the Maharaja that a large number of men had planned to open a library.

Consequently, the first six persons who had signed the petition - Yogavir Simha, Hari Krishna Shrestha, Baikuntha Prasad Shrestha, Laxmi Prasad Devkota, Krishna Prasad Upadhyaya and myself - were arrested and taken to the Maharaja's place. As if we were revolutionaries, each of us was guarded by two armed soldiers.

I was not sure what other people had said, but I said that about 50 men had met and decided that development of Nepal was not possible without education. Children should be sent to school and a library opened for adults. Accordingly, a petition was to be submitted to the Maharaja.

Not satisfied with my explanation, the official taking down my statement, questioned me: "What did you hope to gain by taking part in the meeting? There is that big library at Ghantaghar. Why do you have to open one yourselves?"

I replied: "It is true that there is Bir Library at Ghantaghar. But most of the books there are in Sanskrit, Chinese and Tibetan languages. We cannot visit the library as much as we like it. So, it is of no use to fools like us. Our gurus and parents urge us to seek knowledge to become wise. So, we thought it would be good if we could read books written by great men. We are merchant's sons. We could learn about commodities, the price and the market, etc. from newspapers. I have done so in the hope that we would learn something. Besides, it costs a lot of money for an individual to buy books and newspapers. We cannot afford much money. But in a library, cost would be low - a few rupees at most per year."

Yogavir Simha was detained while the others were told to return again. Another case was also being tried at the same time and one of the signatories to the petition was also involved in the other case. Some of these men were sentenced to imprisonment from two to 12 years. After the judgment on the other case, the Maharaja gave his verdict: "It is true that these people have done something unprecedented in Nepal. They held a meeting and planned to establish a library. However, as they have not yet embarked upon their plan, each of them shall be fined Rs.100/- and freed. The informer Ram Chandra shall be given Rs.2, 200/-"

There was a sense of relief when Maharaja Bhim Shumshere died in 1932.

Maharaja Juddha's advice

The new Maharaja, Juddha Shumshere, also made a declaration soon after his assumption of power. He said, in brief, "As I am heartily engaged in the promotion of happiness of our subjects and in the prosperity of the country, I shall always be effortful in the pursuit of these goals."

One day Major Chandra Bahadur dropped in the shop and said, "Give me a piece of paper." I saluted him and complied with his request. He wrote down, "Attested by Chittadhar that he has heard the summons to be present at Jawalakhel Durbar at 3 P.M. today." "Sign it," he said. I signed it apprehensively. He looked at me and said, "You need not fear. Come for about 15 minutes. Nothing will happen to you."

In the afternoon I went along with my uncle Mandas. There were some other people too in the lawn. Minutes later, the Maharaja emerged followed by some men. He just stood there, with a man holding an umbrella over him. He looked at us and produced a paper from his pocket and began to read the names in it. Then he looked at us and said: "I have asked you to come so that I can know you and tell you something. You have suffered much during the tenure of the late Maharaja. Some of you were sent on exile and some given corporeal punishment. I hope I am not compelled to do the same to you. Notably, you have often printed books in Newari language. You would say that the books came here, but I do think you sent these from here. There are presses here too and you could have the printing done here. Of course, Newari is an old language. But you have to accept the state language (Nepali). You could write in it too. Besides that, it is better for you to follow the profession of your castes - the Bahuns to do the work of the Bahun, the Chhetris that of the Chhetri, the Udas that of the Udas and the Bandas that of the Banda.

"Instead of carrying on your own work, it won't do us good to imitate India. You women too are said to have given religious

discourses and lectures. That is not women's work. Therefore, it is not good to do so. Don't do so. Keep on doing what you are supposed to do. Now, you can go." (The Maharaja's advice was that the Bahun (Brahmins) remain priests, the Chhetris soldiers, the Udas (Tuladhars) merchants and the Bandas (Shakyas) goldsmiths.)

Since that day, the publication of books virtually came to a stop. The monks, however, kept on bringing out religious books.

The Inspiration- Jogavir Simha

I didn't know much nor could I write correctly in Nepal Bhasha. But I write on an impulse. My first poem was published in 1926 in the Buddhist bi-monthly **Buddhadharma**. It was brought out by the scholar Dharmaditya Dharmacharya from Calcutta. In retrospect, I cannot but call it an example of my folly. Much to my disappointment, my guru Yogavir Simha didn't think much of some of my earliest poems. However, with persistent efforts under his kind guidance, I learnt to write better. Finally, he had a word of praise for a piece entitled "Smriti" (Recollections). "Now you are going to be a poet, " he said, "Keep on writing." Two more poems were published in the same bi- monthly.

The guru then began to look more kindly upon my efforts. He introduced me to some well-known poets, although they didn't write in our language.

Then, I composed a long poem entitled "Brabhuvahana." My guru pointed out a discrepancy about my characterization of the two protagonists, who were father and son. As suggested by him, I worked hard on it and intended to dedicate it to him.

During the fall of 1940 I stayed for some time at Kindol Vihar to help Ven. Dhammaloka with his writing. My guru had suggested earlier that I try to write an epic-length poem. I had said that it would be beyond me. But I was also impressed and pleased with the assignment. I had a dozen books about Buddhism and I

thought I should try my hand at a long narrative poem about the life and teachings of the Buddha.

The Punishment - Six years in prison

As mentioned earlier I was arrested in the winter of 1940 and confined overnight at the guardroom in Singh Durbar. On the following day I was questioned about a politically inspired pamphlet distributed in the town as part of the efforts being made allegedly by monks and laymen to bring out a magazine in Nepal Bhasha and of the activities going on in a newly-founded school in Kathmandu. Finally, they asked me, "Who is your guru?"

The question put me in a quandary. My guru Yogavir Simha was also there giving his own statement to the officials. For a moment I was tongue-tied. Then, with due respect to my guru in my heart, I replied: "Why do I need a guru to write in my own language? I have no guru. I have read some books and my writings have been published in **Buddhadharma** and in book form." During my confinement in Singh Durbar, my guru had sent me words of encouragement through a woman who worked as sweeper. As she swept the grounds, she slowly made her way close and said discreetly, "He said that you are not to worry and even if you are sent to jail, you must keep on writing in our language." My guru's concern for me and his message gave me great strength. Eventually, I was sentenced to six year's confinement in the Central Jail in Kathmandu.

The Work of a Lifetime – Sugata Saurabha

Once I got used to life in the jail, I began in earnest to compose **Sugata-Saurabha**, a poem about the life of the Buddha, with an invocation to my guru Yogavir Simha, as follows:

Not gifted with the competence
To expound the Buddhist philosophy
Nor do I know much what they call
Art, or artistic touch, these days.

But, as my teacher, Yogavir Simha,
Has set me the task of writing,
I know for sure that my task is to write
Leaving others to form their own judgement.

As soon as I had written some stanzas, I hid these from prying eyes. When there was a chance I sent the same home for safe-keeping. Meanwhile, Chandra Man Maskey, a reputed artist and fellow prisoner, made a set of illustrations for the book.

The death of my guru in 1941 was a great blow to me. In great sorrow, I penned a few lines, as follows:

My revered preceptor Yogavir Simha
Fell a prey to cruel death
Just when this outcome of my penmanship
Was posed to see the light of day.
Denied the chance of seeing him again,
I pledge myself to fulfil his wishes.

With the intention of giving a treat to my fellow political prisoners when I had done my epic work, I saved every single pice, but the book was not quite finished and the promise remained unfulfilled when, along with the others, I was released in the summer of 1946.

Having regained my freedom, I devoted myself solely to my poem **Sugata-Saurabha** and finished it in the spring of 1946. But it was only in the spring of 1949 that I was able to get it printed in Calcutta. I took my first copy of the book to my uncle, Mahadhar Tuladhar, who lived in the city. He placed the book on his head in reverence and with eyes full of tears of joy, he gave me his blessings, "My boy, you have made our family proud for seven generations."

Then I made a beeline to Professor Suniti Kumar Chatterji, the doyen of Indian philologists. I felt I had come to a living Manjusri when I found myself in his presence. He appreciated the publication of **Sugata Saurabha**, and also advised me to write another book about a Nepalese king so that I would be able to give full expression to my poetic feelings in depicting the culture of the Newars.

Yet another memorable event in connection with the epic was an audience with King Tribhuvan in February 1951. "I have written this book, **Sugata Saurabha** in the jail and intended to dedicate it to my Father, but he passed away before I could do so," I said, "Therefore, I am presenting it to Your Majesty, my Father's Father and Sovereign."

"Why were you put in jail?" His Majesty asked kindly. "Your Majesty, I really do not know what crime I had committed," I said, "But I understand it was because I wrote in my mother tongue and got it printed."

"To have to go to jail for that," observed His Majesty, "The times were just like that then."

Excerpts from Sugata Saurabha

Sorrow exists not by itself,
It is the result of a cause;
That cause can be identified,
And extirpated root and branch.

Many a birth I have had in this world,
Through many vales of sorrow have I passed,
Looking for you, O Master-architect,
But I don't any more need you.

My house itself has been reduced to rubble,
And all my worldly ties loosened;

All my obsessions have been swept aside,
And my desire, the root of sorrow, drowned.

*

The wise should have nothing to do
With the two extreme paths-
The path of indulgence
And that of abstinence.

*

If someone asserts something as my word,
It shouldn't be accepted or rejected ;
Take it if it conforms to our cannons,
And reject it outright, if it doesn't.

*

The presence of the physician
Cannot cure the disease;
The patient should take the medicine
To gain the desired end.

Likewise, to attain *nirvana*
Discipline is the key,
My concrete presence or absence
Has no bearing on it.

Now listen what *nirvana* is:
We know a lamp goes out
When it has no oil left:
Likewise *nirvana* comes about

When a person is emptied of
All sensual desires:
It's not somewhere beyond the earth.
It's just a state of mind.

LASTING MEMORY

Mother's Words, 1929

My mother's health continued to deteriorate. One day, while my sister, Moti Laxmi, had gone to fetch water and my aunt, Siddhi Laxmi, was busy in the kitchen, mother called me to her bedside and said, "My son, I have something to say but I have had no chance to be alone with you. Sit down."

I sat down on a chair and she said, "Listen, there is no sign of my recovery. It is only because of your care that I am still alive. I am getting weaker all the time. Your little sister, Mani Laxmi, has died but you have all grown up and can take care of yourselves. There is something I want to say to you."

Mother stopped for breath before she resumed: "First, there is your sister, Moti Laxmi. Because of my painful legs, she had to stay to take care of me. Her husband got another wife and she is left here forever. Take care of her.

"Second, everyone wants to take advantage of you. There are only two families in town who wish you well. You can depend on them.

"Third, your wife is gullible. You may trust her gold, silver, jewellery, clothes, Indian money and gold coins, but don't give her ready cash. She will part with the money in no time.

"Fourth, don't ever trust anyone completely.

"My boy, keep this in your mind. You are already looking after the family. I don't have to tell you what to do."

I accepted her advice whole-heartedly. But on the question of trust, I was a bit doubtful. So, I said to her, "It is on trust that everything depends. What can be done without trust?"

Mother simply said, "Do as you please, but remember my words. You may find it useful in the future."

From that day on, I lived by her advice faithfully. But on the last point, I did not. As a consequence, I was proved wrong a number of times.

To my great sorrow, my mother died soon afterwards, on the 16th of April, 1929. The morning after her death when my sister Beti Laxmi came home crying I was completely shattered. Then I cried for a long time. This sister had been married into a family that had been ostracized for some time because of a split within the community. Despite my mother's repeated requests, I had refused to send for her. I thought I was a leading member of the faction and must set an example by excluding her from our family.

The Earthquake, 1934

The earthquake hit the town at about 2 o'clock in the afternoon. I hastily put the shutters down in the shop and ran to my guru Yogavir Simha's place. I helped him to come out from under some debris and then made my way back home. It was getting dark.

There was wreckage all along the streets. I found a Tibetan man lying helpless in a street corner, badly hurt from a falling wall. His shinbone was broken and there was blood flowing from the wound. He kept crying. Someone had left water and some beaten rice for him.

I just looked at the poor man and walked away. He was lying there the next day too. On the third day, the man had died and taken away by soldiers. If I had got some help and carried him to the

hospital, he would not have died. I regretted it very much. It was one of the great mistakes in my life.

Wife's Letter, 1935

Sometime in the fall of 1935, my wife went to Kalimpong with her father. It was her first ever travel beyond the country. She used to worry whenever I went to Calcutta and didn't write to her for a week or so. She had not learnt to write well, but I got a letter from her soon enough in a childish scrawl that read, "I have seen what I have not seen before, but as far as I am concerned, there is nothing greater for me than my husband."

I cannot say how many times I have read that letter over and over again. I have treasured it among my papers.

The Vow, 1940-1946

All the years I was in jail (1940-1946), my wife took only one meal a day. I learnt about it only on the second day after my release, when she came to the bedroom after her chores in the kitchen. The previous evening, she had appeared lean and thin – a very pitiable picture she had made of herself. Then she told me of her vow. "If I had not taken it," she said with a sense of relief, "I doubt it if I would have survived at all. I would have become mad or gone by now. As long as you were held at Singha Durbar, I waited, expecting you to come home any time. But when you were sent to the jail, I could not bear it any more. That day, I wept until it was evening. I was restless and could not get a wink of sleep. At midnight I stepped into the shrine room and took my vow before the gods, "I will take only one meal a day until my Chitta is released."

The End

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